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Evaluation

Evaluation of the regional cooperation framework for Africa, 2002-2006*

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*The compilation of data required to provide the Executive Board with the most current information has delayed submission of the present report.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report provides a summary of the findings of the independent evaluation of the regional cooperation framework (RCF) for Africa which the Evaluation Office submits to the Executive Board. The evaluation of the second RCF for Africa (2002-2006) was carried out between September 2006 and January 2007. The second RCF was originally approved for the period 2002-2006, but was extended to 2007 so that it could be harmonized with the cycle of the multi-year funding framework (MYFF) 2004-2007.

2. The main objectives of the evaluation were to: (a) assess the achievement of the intended organizational goals and development results, highlighting key results of outputs and outcomes, lessons learned and good practices, both as they relate to the specified programme goals of UNDP and in relation to broader national strategies in the region; (b) assess performance of the RCF and specify the development results achieved in the area of policy advice, capacity development and knowledge management within the core results areas on which the regional programme has focused, as well as assessment of the scope and range of strategic partnerships formed; (c) based on the actual results, ascertain how the RCF has contributed to positioning UNDP strategically to establish its comparative advantage or niche as a major upstream global policy advisor for poverty reduction and sustainable human development and as a knowledge-based organization in the region; and (d) identify innovative approaches used within the RCF programme and project portfolio, their related outcomes and lessons learned within UNDP and in programme countries. The evaluation sought to address key questions in terms of the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the regional programme.

3. The RCF evaluations were to be conducted as a 'meta-evaluation', drawing on the results and conclusions of independent outcome evaluations undertaken during the period of the RCF for each of the regional programmes. The meta-evaluation methodology required a review and validation of findings and data from existing evaluations (such as a comprehensive desk review and analysis of outcome and project evaluations and other self-assessment reports); conducting selective spot checks (in-country project visits and consultations with RCF stakeholders on the ground, for example); and triangulation of the available data and information.

4. The outcome evaluations provided were found to be uneven in quality and inadequate in terms of their coverage of the second RCF for Africa. Nor did the evaluations capture programme-level results. As it was not possible to conduct the planned meta-evaluation, the results reported for a sample of projects were reviewed and the resulting outcomes assessed.

5. Key reports and reference documents for the RCF were reviewed, as were more than 100 other reports and related documents. RCF Africa II project documents were reviewed for 55 of the ongoing projects in the portfolio. Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with a wide cross-section of stakeholders. These included representatives of African governments, regional and sub-regional organizations and NGOs; advisory board members, representatives of non-UNDP executing agencies, the UNDP regional service centre and sub-regional resource facilities (SURFs); UNDP staff in the field working on RCF initiatives, headquarters staff and in UNDP country office staff. Visits to these sites covered activities under the major thematic areas of the RCF – HIV/AIDS, conflict prevention and peacebuilding, gender and environment, governance and globalization. All projects valued over $4 million were also visited. In addition to the selected countries, visits were made to donor partners in

Brussels and London, and interviews were conducted in Canada with the Canadian International Development Agency.

II. Main findings

A. Relevance

6. The evaluation found that the themes of the RCF Africa (2002-2006) are relevant to the needs and development priorities of the region and to the issues that African leaders have identified in the NEPAD as critical for the region's development – good governance, economic development, conflict prevention and peace building. The themes of the RCF also address problems with trans-boundary implications, in which joint action and greater regional integration and coordination can add value. It is also aligned with the strategic goals of the UNDP MYFF, 2004-2007, particularly in the areas of poverty reduction and democratic governance, but also in crisis prevention and gender mainstreaming and to a lesser extent in the environment. The evaluation also found that the thematic areas of support for the RCF are in line with the global programme principles and its practice areas. The second RCF for Africa is working in areas – democratic governance, globalization and conflict resolution/peace building – in which UNDP's presence throughout Africa, along with its reputation and stature, gives it a natural and viable role to play, and the RCF initiatives are having policy and advocacy impacts.

B. Effectiveness

7. The evaluation looked at the effectiveness of RCF in terms of organizational goals, institutional criteria and approaches, such as policy advice and advocacy, support to the MDGs, communication, coordination and building capacity, partnerships and synergies; and in terms of the developmental results of the themes: democratization and participatory governance, globalization, conflict prevention, peacebuilding and disaster preparedness, HIV/AIDS, and 'other', which includes the cross-cutting themes of gender and environment as well as energy and water resources.

8. Capitalizing on the reputation of UNDP as politically neutral, the RCF was successful in supporting dialogues and exchanges on sensitive issues and in a very timely fashion. In addition, the programme has supported analysis and advocacy-level activities through a variety of initiatives such as studies, regional workshops and conferences on various issues, including conflict management, public sector ethics, reinventing government in Africa, and human rights, as well as promoting improved human development reports. Those activities were very valuable in bringing partners from throughout Africa together to share best practices and lessons learned. The forums helped to build relationships and confidence between groups and permit the development of joint plans of action to address transboundary issues. This was particularly true for countries that otherwise have little access to official development assistance resources or have a long history of not interacting with one another. In some cases periodic follow-up meetings resulted in peer pressure to either participate or progress, and at times the events were catalysts for further action (such as the Regional Centre for Small Arms workshop for police, military and customs officers responsible for enforcing laws to prevent the proliferation and cross-border movement of small arms in the Great Lakes region).

9. The RCF identifies capacity development as the 'lens' through which African development issues are perceived, and measures to address them are formulated

and implemented in the RCF. Although it endorses effective capacity development principles and practices, including the recognition that capacity development is a long-term process, the RCF has only a four- or five-year horizon, and many of its initiatives of short duration. The institutional development support to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), for example, was approved for a period of 14 months. Although that was extended for an additional year, this sort of short-term support is contrary to stated UNDP capacity development principles. In another case, the addition of small arms control to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), UNDP did not carry out a proper assessment of the capacity, mandate or priorities of the institution prior to implementation – another precondition to effective capacity development.

10. Through its support at the regional level, UNDP worked in partnership with over 15 regional organizations and entities, including intergovernmental bodies and civil society groups such as the Africa 2000 Network, the African Futures Institute, the African Leadership Forum, ECOWAS, and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). They included some of the key African institutions and initiatives such as the African Union, NEPAD, and the African Peer Review Mechanism. UNDP worked with several international development partners, including the Department for International Development, CIDA, Belgium, the European Union and Japan), and mobilized resources from a variety of development partners, raising $74.1 million.

11. The evaluation team found that RBA operated on two parallel tracks, with very little coordination or communication between country programmes and regional programmes. The RCF and its individual projects were seen as emanating from UNDP headquarters, and neither the countries nor the country offices understood how to access regional programmes or resources in order to participate or conduct complementary activities. The lack of communication between the regional programme and country offices has made it difficult for country offices to coordinate the regional projects with their in-country programming. It has also limited the ability of UNDP to leverage its reputation and knowledge base in promoting development policy with other donors and with country governments.

12. The effectiveness of the RCF in attaining intended development results was mixed, and the level of the programme contribution to those results is impossible to assess with rigour due to the lack of indicators of achievement and the lack of baseline and timeline data. Without agreed indicators of programme achievements, reporting is not uniform, and meaningful aggregations at the programme level are impossible. There are clear indications that the initiatives supported by the RCF are contributing to the achievement of desired programme-level results in the 'strengthening democratic and participatory governance' thematic area. Overall, progress in Africa has been in the desired direction during the life of the RCF, with the African Peer Review Mechanism – among others – promoting improved accountability; capacity-building efforts with the African Union improving the effectiveness of democratic systems; and the African Governance Forum promoting more effective participation of civil society. However, it is difficult to discern the level of the RCF contribution. For example, while more countries have democratically elected governments and the Forum of Former African Heads of State – which is supported under the RCF – is working to promote and consolidate democratic governance in Africa, it is not easy to establish a causal link between the two, since the Forum of Former African Heads of State constitutes only one influence on the progress toward greater democratic governance in Africa.

13. Objectives under the globalization theme included strengthening regional and subregional economic cooperation and integration in the areas of trade, market and

enterprise development; and strengthening pro-poor economic governance and public finance management. As with that for democracy and governance, general progress is in the right direction, but again attribution to the RCF poses problems, since the improved economic performance of Africa over the past five years is the result of many influences. Nonetheless, the RCF was praised for the flexible and responsive support it provided to African ministers and African World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiators in Geneva preparing for WTO meetings, as well as for support to SADC and the Organization for the Harmonization of Business Law in Africa (creating an enabling environment for greater economic development in West and Central African states through training on regional and global trade regimes). The capacity development work with African partners in government, regional institutions and the civil and private sectors helped bring Africa into the world economy and lessen its marginalization, for example through supporting studies related to mobility of business persons, trade and investment, as well as policy development work with African government institutions.

14. In spite of ongoing and emerging challenges, the RCF is contributing directly to African efforts to prevent conflicts and build peace. There are good indications that RCF Africa II is on track to achieve the desired results at the outcome level, through support to ECOWAS and the Regional Centre on Small Arms Control, as well as by training faculty members in the region on conflict analysis, mediation, and negotiation. While the institutions supported by the RCF are also supported by others, several found RCF support important. For example, the Peace and Security Directorate of the African Union found the funding of analysts, who are the focal points for providing up-to-date information and analysis on conflict situations to the African Union, and the funding of special envoys to ensure that African Union member states ratified the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union in July 2002, were critical in moving operations forward to the point where African Union peacekeepers could be fielded.

15. Several initiatives have been funded under the RCF, although the data available do not demonstrate any outcome level results as yet for some of them. It is also difficult to differentiate the results of the regional programme from those of the country offices and other specialized United Nations agencies, the World Health Organization and UNAIDS, as well as a plethora of projects and programmes addressing HIV/AIDS at all levels, funded by virtually every bilateral and multilateral organization. Following an evaluation that found that "there was no chance that the project would produce the outputs", the South Africa Capacity Initiative – one of the key HIV/AIDS interventions under RCF Africa II – is now addressing government capacity-building more generally rather than solely for HIV/AIDS.

16. Most projects report giving consideration to gender balance in selecting project participants and/or beneficiaries but, in general, there is little analysis of gender concerns and challenges in project documents. There is no outline of the specific roles and responsibilities of men and women, boys and girls, nor any indication of how resources will be allocated to facilitate the participation of the various groups. In addition, while quite often noting that women's participation will be supported, project documents rarely set specific targets or strategies to achieve this, and gender disaggregated data are rarely available. In those instances in which a regional activity is based in an existing institution, there is no indication of an assessment of the capacity of that institution to deliver a gender-focused programme or activity.

17. Integration of environmental concerns is weak. With the exception of the initial undertaking to mainstream environmental concerns, the documents reviewed appear to be more or less silent on this issue. Energy and water resources were added during the reorientation of RCF Africa II in 2004. RCF has supported the

development of an ECOWAS regional white paper on increasing access to energy for rural and peri-urban populations, which has been ratified by the member states. The document is being used to engage financing and donor interest and the member states have approved guidelines on the development of MDG-based energy access strategies and costing methodologies. These are being piloted, but it is too early to see outcomes as yet.

C. Efficiency

18. Efficiency was measured by looking at programme oversight and governance, including resource mobilization, organizational strategy, execution and implementation modalities, and performance measurement. While funds mobilization was successful, oversight, management, coordination and communications were weak. Accountability and reporting lines and decision-making authorities were unclear. Links between expected results, required resources and monitoring and evaluation systems were missing or weak. Reporting was highly variable and did not seem to be used for management and control. Use of policy advisors, including the advisory board, was limited. The external advisory board, established at the beginning of RCF Africa II in order to provide policy guidance and ensure that the programme remained "closely grounded in African priorities and emerging realities", met infrequently and was under-utilized. Members of the advisory board described their terms of reference as vague, and the board did not meet until after the parameters of RCF Africa II were finalized.

19. While overall resource mobilization was effective, financial management has not been. Financial information was not available to field managers on a timely basis, and the budget fluctuated, dropping by 25 per cent during the approval of the MYFF in 2004, and then increasing again in 2006, when the end date of the programme was extended. The uncertainties in financing created some implementation difficulties for initiatives on the ground, as budgets that had been approved were cut and later reinstated. Those uncertainties, compounded by the lack of timely financial information, made planning and results achievement difficult for the individual RCF Africa II initiatives. In addition, the evaluators were told that difficulties in obtaining financial and other information has led some bilateral donors to raise questions about the capacity of UNDP to be accountable and manage resources in an effective and timely fashion.

20. The RCF has a complex organization, with the Strategic and Regional Initiatives Unit (SRIU) of the Regional Bureau for Africa (RBA) acting as the key planner and manager of the programme. The programme is executed by 10 different organizations in partnership with over 15 African organizations, from project management sites in North America, Europe and 14 African countries. This may help to explain some of the difficulties in coordination and communication. Operating out of New York, SRIU carries out central management of the regional programme and makes essential decisions regarding project funding and operations. The regional projects and programmes are implemented by different implementing agencies. Roles and responsibilities are not completely clear: some project managers reported not being sure which decisions they could take themselves and which required approval from New York. Some reporting lines are also difficult to understand; for example, the Assistant Resident Representative/Representation to the African Union and Liaison Office with the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) – both key partners – reports to the UNDP Resident Representative in Addis Ababa, who has no direct reporting relationship to SRIU. The Senior Regional Coordinator/Regional Support for

NEPAD, also based in Addis Ababa and the liaison with another important partner, on the other hand, reports directly to SRIU in New York.

21. Most regional programme coordinators state that although SURFs/regional service centres have provided and can continue to provide good technical advice, especially at the project planning stage, they rarely call upon them. This may be a function of the centralization of programme planning and management decision-making in New York. However, the Bureau for Development Policy also reports that SRIU does not consult them, including on key issues such as integrating gender and environment. Many key programme management functions, financial management, procurement, and administrative support are provided by UNOPS, which is the executing agency for most RCF initiatives. Field managers reported delays as long as six months in getting financial information from UNOPS, which UNOPS attributed to difficulties in implementing the Atlas system. In addition, the UNOPS chart of accounts is not particularly well set up for producing institutional-level financial management information and does not link well with those financial management information systems. This is not efficient, and several partners reported running duplicate systems in an attempt to ascertain their current financial position, or to link their RCF funding to their institutional financial management system.

22. While SRIU had created a results-oriented tracking system, performance measurement, review and reporting functions were found to be inadequate. At the time of this evaluation, there were multiple objectives for each theme but results were not usually measurable and indicators of achievement had not been developed. Without clear indicators of achievements, the reports generally provided activities and outputs against key results statements, but provided little information on outcomes or programme level results. The evaluation team noted a general absence of poverty and gender objectives in project documentation and, in line with the general absence of results-formulation and monitoring processes, did not find any established means to determine the extent and nature of the RCF contribution to poverty reduction or gender equality. No attempt was made to compare, compile or roll up the information in these reports to either the thematic or the programme level. As most individual project reporting and monitoring to date has focused on output rather than outcome achievements, it is not surprising that most project evaluations conducted to date have restricted themselves to evaluating project outputs, thereby limiting their usefulness for meta-evaluation purposes.

D. Sustainability

23. While the RCF has been successful in enhancing the capacity of many of the African organizations with which it works, the long-term sustainability of results for several initiatives is doubtful. In the case of the African Union and the Regional Centre on Small Arms, the availability of funds is central to sustaining the institutions and their regional programmes. In both cases, although the participating governments are making contributions to help support the institutions, those contributions are rarely sufficient to pay for capacity development and to allow the institutions to fulfil their regional mandate.

24. In some cases UNDP has created implementing partner institutions whose ability to continue to produce regional benefits once donor funding ends is questionable. For example, the Africa 2000 Network, a regional initiative, was transformed into a linked group of nationally registered NGOs, some of which have been successful in mobilizing funds from UNDP country offices and other donors, while others have not. The coordinating body for Africa 2000 is completely dependent on funds from the RCF, which end in 2007, and that

coordinating body is responsible for sharing lessons learned, conducting field visits, and collecting success stories. It is difficult to see how the regional links will be maintained following the end of RCF funding. The Africa 2000 coordinating body has been linked to Capacity 2015, another UNDP-funded initiative, in order to continue its activities, but this continued dependence is still is not a sustainability or an exit strategy. In general, sustainability and exit strategies are missing from RCF initiatives.

III. Conclusions and lessons learned

A. Conclusions

25. Outcome-level results are indicative rather than exhaustive, due to the lack of data and the somewhat short time-frame. While progress has been made toward all the objectives for RCF Africa II since its inception in 2002, projects within each development theme are dispersed geographically, chronologically and by executing agency. Consultations and anecdotal evidence indicate that the regional programme has contributed to key results within each thematic area; however, it is difficult to detect synergies or complementarities among them or to measure the aggregate development outcome for that theme objectively. However, in some cases there have been subsequent project phases that have built up to an outcome level result, such as 'capacity-building for trade and development'. In others, more than one initiative may have promoted a particular outcome, such as 'addressing small arms in the Great Lakes' and 'support to Peacebuilding in the Great Lakes'.

26. Working with and through regional institutions as partners has been a good model for producing synergies between partners and countries in the region. However, the short-term nature of the support provided by the RCF may not be appropriate for capacity development programming with young and fragile institutions that will require concentrated assistance for several years.

27. The performance of the RCF portfolio is stronger in the thematic areas that build on the core mandate of UNDP and its recognized strengths in policy, governance and conflict resolution, and less so in areas such as globalization, HIV/AIDS, and energy and water supply. Other United Nations agencies such as WHO and UNAIDS have better technical capacity on HIV/AIDS; the United Nations Commission on Trade and Development, WTO and the International Trade Centre have a better defined comparative advantage, technical skills and mandates than UNDP in globalization and trade capacity development; and the United Nations Capital Development Fund has skills in economic development programmes to reach the poor. Given scarce resources, including person hours and skills, greater focus of resources on areas where UNDP has a strong comparative advantage may result in a higher level of development impact.

28. Poor attention to internal monitoring and reporting on results undermines the ability of UNDP to leverage its reputation and knowledge base in promoting development policy with other donors and country governments. Weak monitoring and evaluation systems hamper the ability to assess the level of impact, including in relation to financial and other inputs.

29. The comparative advantage of the UNDP field presence is undermined by inadequate coordination between the regional programme (managed from New York) and the decentralized country offices, and also between RCF Africa and the

RCF for Arab States, which would be required to implement truly pan-African initiatives.

30. While flexibility is needed in order to continue to respond to emerging needs, a greater focus on selecting and working in partnership with key African institutions would enhance the performance and sustainability of results.

B. Lessons learned

31. *Focus.* RCF Africa II had a stronger impact, both developmentally and on institutional criteria like policy and advocacy, when it responded to the priorities of African stakeholders and built on the comparative strengths and advantages of UNDP. Maximum impact from relatively limited resources comes from focusing on the areas where African priorities and UNDP strengths intersect, such as in governance, conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

32. *Partnerships are difficult to develop; dependencies are not.* Building a partnership is easier by establishing a direct relationship with local institutions than by working through an executing agency. Capacity development requires a clear assessment of needs, followed by a plan to address those needs. Capacity-building takes time and a long-term commitment. Young and fragile institutions do not have the capacity to manage and mitigate the impact of fluctuating budget and development priorities, and will only develop that capacity through self-management, not by being managed by others.

33. *What gets measured gets done.* Responsibility for management cannot be delegated without strong financial and management systems and measures of performance, including an integrated system of reporting, monitoring and evaluation that fills both internal management and external reporting requirements. As initiatives were not required to develop and report on quantitative and qualitative gender-sensitive indicators of performance, integration of gender mainstreaming received only lip service. This is also true for environment, the other cross-cutting dimension.

34. *Weak monitoring and reporting*: *weak evaluation base.* An ex-post evaluation cannot fill the data gaps left by inadequate internal monitoring and reporting. Evaluations build on indicators of achievement, baseline data and continuous monitoring and measurement of progress. Meta-evaluations are only possible if existing evaluations are sufficient in number, coverage and quality.

IV. Recommendations

35. Based on the findings of the evaluation, the recommendations set out below are presented for consideration by RBA.

(a) *Maximize African ownership of the regional programme.* Greater use of the advisory board should be made, to ensure that the RCF has the capacity to identify and respond to evolving African development challenges and remains firmly anchored in African realities. This would help ensure that institutional and capacity development targets are being achieved. RBA should revise the terms of reference for the advisory board to ensure regular board meetings, and board members should be provided with regular reports on the progress of the framework against agreed gender-sensitive, quantitative and qualitative indicators and changes in the environment. Moreover, this flexibility must take place within the context of, rather than as a substitute for, a long-term strategic plan.

(b) *Streamline the focus* of the next RCF to a maximum of three clearly defined themes, with fewer outputs and outcomes under each theme. It should continue to focus on the regional priorities of strengthening democratic and participatory

governance, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and disaster management. In addition, RCF resources should be concentrated on capacity-building for a smaller number of larger interventions, linked to existing regional African institutions. Many of the current programmes and activities should be phased out prior to the end of the second RCF. Decisions to allow current projects to be carried over into the next RCF implementation period need to be based on clear, consistent criteria, with a cap of project funding allowed for carry-over – suggested at 25 per cent of RCF total funding.

(c) *Improve coordination between regional and country programmes in Africa.* This can be achieved by decentralizing two regional Bureau Deputy Directors, with joint responsibility both for the RCF and UNDP country programmes, to locations in Africa. The regional programme in Africa needs to develop the capacity of regional and pan-African institutions to deliver their mandates. Partner institutions need to be provided with financial planning and management tools and training. Maximum responsibility should be transferred to them as a component of overall capacity development and institutional strengthening.

(d) *Enhance pan-African synergies through improved information sharing and enhanced cooperation between RBA and the Regional Bureau for the Arab States.* Establish a joint UNDP-Africa and Arab States representative office in Addis Ababa for respective accreditation to pan-African institutions such as the African Union and ECA. This would facilitate the participation of North African countries in pan-African activities.

(e) *Incorporate gender equality and environment across all interventions.* Both should be required in the planning and formulation of future initiatives. Sufficient financial resources for gender mainstreaming and environmental sustainability (in every project) should be allocated for all future projects if gender and environment are to be integrated as cross-cutting themes.

(f) *Clarify roles, responsibilities, accountability and reporting structures* to implement results-based management effectively. The RCF should adopt an enhanced results-based performance management, measurement and reporting system. Similar performance measurement frameworks, including clear programme-level indicators of achievement, should be developed at the thematic and RCF levels. Project-level reports should be rolled up into thematic and regional programme-level reports, at a minimum annually, for presentation to the advisory board.

(g) *Include in project budgets funds explicitly earmarked for monitoring systems,* including development of indicators, baseline data, data sources and collection methods, as well as responsibility and timing of collection for the outcomes and impact levels.